

'Aashooraa': Celebration or Mourning?

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah (rahimahullah)
Summarised from his Book 'Al-Fataawa al-Kubra' Part 5

[Q]: What is the ruling on those actions performed on the day of 'Aashooraa', such as wearing kohl, taking a bath (ghusl), using henna, shaking hands with one another, cooking grains (huboob), showing happiness and so on...? Has any saheeh hadeeth to that effect been narrated from the Prophet (sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam)? If there is no saheeh hadeeth to that effect, does doing these things constitute bid'ah (innovation)? What about the things that the other people do, such as mourning, grieving, going without anything to drink, eulogizing, wailing, rending their garments, etc.? Is there any basis for these actions?

[A]: All Praise is to Allaah, the Lord of the Worlds. Nothing to that effect has been reported in any Saheeh Hadeeth from the Prophet (sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam) or from his Companions (radiyallaahu anhu). None of the Imaams of the Muslims encouraged or recommended such things, neither the four Imaams, nor any others. No reliable scholars have narrated anything like this, neither from the Prophet (sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam), nor from the Sahabah (radiyallaahu anhum), nor from the Taabi'een; neither in any saheeh report nor in a da'eef (weak) report; neither in the books of Saheeh, Sunan, nor in the Musnads.

No hadeeth of this nature was known during the best centuries, but some of the later narrators reported ahaadeeth like the one which says:

"Whoever puts kohl in his eyes on the day of 'Aashooraa' will not suffer from eye disease in that year, and whoever takes a bath (does ghusl) on the day of 'Aashooraa' will not get sick in that year, etc."

They also narrated reports concerning the supposed virtues of praying on the day of 'Aashooraa' and other reports saying that on the day of 'Aashooraa' Adam (alayhis salaam) repented, the Ark settled on Mount Joodi, Yoosuf (alayhis salaam) returned to Ya'qoob (alayhis salaam), Ibraaheem (alayhis salaam) was saved from the fire, the ram was provided for sacrifice instead of Ismaa'eel (alayhis salaam), and so on.

They also reported a fabricated ahadeeth that is falsely attributed to the Prophet (sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam), which says:

"Whoever is generous to his family on the day of 'Aashooraa', Allaah will be generous to him for the rest of the year."

[Then Ibn Taymiyah discussed the two misguided groups who were in Koofah, Iraq, both of whom took 'Aashooraa' as a festival because of their bid'ah]

The Raafidhi group made an outward show of allegiance to the Ahl al-Bayt although inwardly they were either heretics and disbelievers or ignorant and bound by whims and desires. The Naasibi group hated 'Ali (radiyallaahu anhu) and his companions, because of the troubles and killings that had occurred.

It is reported in Saheeh Muslim that the Prophet of Allaah (sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam) said:

"In (the tribe of) Thaqeef there will be a liar and an oppressor."

The liar was al-Mukhtaar ibn Abi 'Ubayd al-Thaqafi, who made an outward show of allegiance to and support of the Ahl al-Bayt, and killed 'Ubayd-Allah ibn Ziyaad, the governor of Iraq, who had equipped the party that killed al-Husayn ibn 'Ali (radiyallaahu anhu); then he (al-Mukhtaar) made it clear that he was a liar, by claiming to be a prophet and that Jibreel (alayhis salaam) brought revelation to him. People told Ibn Umar (radiyallaahu anhu) and Ibn 'Abbas (radiyallaahu anhu) about this, and said to one of them: "al-Mukhtaar ibn Abi 'Ubayd is claiming to receive revelation." He said: "He is telling the truth, for Allaah says:

"Shall I inform you (O people) upon whom the shayaateen (devils) descend? They descend upon every lying, sinful person."

[Soorah ash-Shoorah (26): 221]

They said to the other: "Al-Mukhtaar is claiming that he receives inspiration." He said, "He is telling the truth:

"And certainly, the Shayaateen (devils) do inspire their friends (from mankind) to dispute with you." [Soorah al-An'am (6): 121]

As for the oppressor, this was al-Hajjaaj ibn Yoosuf al-Thaqafi, who was opposed to 'Ali (radiyallaahu anhu) and his companions. Al-Hajjaaj was a Naasibi and al-Mukhtaar was a Raafidhi, and this Raafidhi was a greater liar and more guilty of fabrication and heresy, because he claimed to be a prophet...

There was much trouble and fighting between these two groups in Kufa. When al-Husayn ibn 'Ali was killed on the day of 'Aashooraa', he was killed by the sinful, wrongdoing group. Allaah honored al-Husayn with martyrdom, as He honored other members of his family, and raised his status, as He honored Hamzah, Ja'far, his father Ali and others.

Al-Husayn and his brother al-Hasan are the leaders of the youth of Paradise. High status can only be attained through suffering as the Prophet (sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam) said, when he was asked which people suffer the most:

"The Prophets, then righteous people, then the next best and the next best.

A man will suffer according to his level of faith. If his faith is solid, he will suffer more, but if his faith is shaky, he will suffer less. The believer will keep on suffering until he walks on the earth with no sin." [Tirmidhee and others]

Al-Hasan and al-Husayn achieved the high status by the help and decree of Allaah. They did not suffer as much as their forefathers had, for they were born and raised during the glory days of Islam, and the Muslims respected and honored them. The Prophet (sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam) died when they were still young, and Allaah blessed them by testing them in such a manner that they would be able to catch up with the rest of their family members, as those who were of a higher status than them were also tested. Ali ibn Abi Taalib (radiyallaahu anhu) was better than them, and he was killed as a shaheed (martyr).

The killing of al-Husayn was one of the things that caused fitnah (tribulation) among the people, as was the killing of Uthmaan (radiyallaahu anhu), which was one of the greatest causes of fitnah, because of which the ummah is still split today. Thus, the Prophet (sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam) said:

"There are three things, whoever is saved from them is truly saved: my death, the killing of a patient khaleefah, and the Dajjaal ('antichrist')."

[Then, Shaykh al-Islam (rahimahullaah) mentioned a little about the biography of al-Hasan and his just character and he said:]

'Then he died, and Allaah was pleased with him and honored him. Some groups wrote to al-Husayn and promised to support and help him if he went ahead and declared himself khaleefah, but they were not sincere. When al-Husayn sent his cousin [son of his paternal uncle] to them, they broke their word and gave help to the one they had promised to defend him against, and fought with him against [al-Husayn's cousin]. Those who were wise and who loved al-Husayn, such as Ibn 'Abbaas (radiyallaahu anhu) and Ibn Umar (radiyallaahu anhu) and others, advised him not to go to them, and not to accept any promises from them. They thought that his going to them served no useful interest and that the consequences would not be good.

Things turned out just as they said, and this is how Allaah decreed it would happen. When al-Husayn went out and saw that things were not as he had expected, he asked them to let him go back, or to let him join the army that was defending the borders of Islam, or join his cousin Yazeed, but they would not let him do any of these things unless he gave himself up to them as a prisoner. So he fought with them, and they killed him and some of those who were with him, and he was wrongfully slain so he died as a shaheed whose martyrdom brought him honor from Allaah, and thus he was reunited with the good and pure members of his family. His murder brought shame on those who had wrongfully killed him, and caused much mischief among the people. An ignorant, wrongful group who were either heretics and hypocrites, or misguided and misled made a show of allegiance to him and the members of his household, so they took the day of 'Aashooraa' as a day of mourning and wailing, in which they openly displayed the rituals of jaahiliyyah such as slapping their cheeks and rending their garments, grieving in the manner of the jaahiliyyah.

But what Allaah has commanded us to do when disaster strikes? One is to bear with patience and fortitude when disaster strikes, seek reward, and remember that all things come from Allaah and we must return to Him:

"... but give glad tidings to al-saabiroon (the patient ones), who, when afflicted with calamity, say: 'Truly, to Allaah we belong and truly, to Him we shall return.' They are those on whom are al-salawaat (the blessings) (i.e., who are blessed and will be forgiven) from their Lord, and (they are those who) receive His Mercy, and it is they who are the guided ones." [Soorah al-Baqarah 2:155-157]

It is reported in al-Saheeh that the Prophet (sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam) said:

"He is not one of us who strikes his cheeks, rends his garments and prays with the prayer of Jaahiliyyah."

And he (sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam) said:

"I have nothing to do with those who strike [their cheeks], shave [their heads] and rend [their garments]."

"If the woman who wails does not repent before she dies, she will be raised up on the Day of Resurrection wearing trousers made of tar and a shirt of scabs."

In al-Musnad, it is reported from Faatimah bint al-Husayn, from her father al-Husayn, that the Prophet (sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam) said:

"There is no man who suffers a calamity, and when he remembers it, even if it is old, he says 'Innaa Lillaahi wa innaa ilayhi raaji'oon (Truly, to Allaah we belong and truly, to Him we shall return),' Allaah will give a reward equal to the reward He gave him on the day he suffered the calamity."

This is how Allaah honors the believers. If the disaster suffered by al-Husayn, and other disasters, are mentioned after all this time, we should say "**Innaa Lillaahi wa innaa ilayhi raaji'oon**" - Truly, to Allaah we belong and truly, to Him we shall return - as Allaah and His Messenger (sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam) commanded, so as to be given the reward like that earned on the day of the disaster itself. If Allaah commanded us to be patient and steadfast and to seek reward at the time of the disaster, then how about after the passing of time?

The Shaytaan made this attractive to those who are misled, so they took the day of 'Aashooraa' as an occasion of mourning, when they grieve and wail, recite poems of grief and tell stories filled with lies. Whatever truth there may be in these stories, serves no purpose other than the renewal of their grief and sectarian feeling, and the stirring up of hatred and hostility among the Muslims, which they do by cursing those who came before them, and telling many lies, and causing much trouble in the world.

The various sects of Islam have never known any group tell more lies or cause more trouble or help the kuffaar against the Muslims more than this misguided and evil group. They are even worse than the Khawaarij who went beyond the pale of Islam. They are the ones of whom the Prophet (sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam) said:

"They will kill the people of Islam and will leave alone the people who worship idols."

This group cooperated with the Jews, Christians and mushrikeen against the members of the Prophet's household and his believing ummah. The evil and harm that they do to the Muslims cannot be enumerated by any man, no matter how eloquent he is.

Some others either Naasibis who oppose and have enmity towards al-Husayn and his family or ignorant people who try to fight evil with evil, corruption with corruption, lies with lies and bid'ah with bid'ah opposed them by fabricating reports in favor of making the day of 'Aashooraa' a day of celebration, by wearing kohl and henna, spending money on one's children, cooking special dishes and other things that are done on 'Eeds and special occasions. These people took the day of 'Aashooraa' as a festival like 'Eed, whereas the others took it as a day of mourning. Both are wrong, and both go against the Sunnah, even though the other group (the Rafidis) are worse in intention and more ignorant and more plainly wrong...

But Allah commands us to be just and to treat others well. Prophet (sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam) said:

"Those of you who live after my death will see many disputes. I urge you to adhere to my Sunnah and the sunnah of my rightly-guided successors (al-khulafa' al-raashidoon) who come after me. Hold onto it as if biting it with your teeth. Beware of newly-innovated matters, for every innovation is a going astray."

Neither the Prophet (sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam), nor his rightly guided successors did any of these things on the day of 'Aashooraa', they neither made it a day of mourning nor a day of celebration.

But "when the Prophet (sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam) came to Madeenah, he saw the Jews fasting on the day of 'Aashooraa'. He said, "What is this?" They said, 'This is the day when Allaah saved Moosa from drowning, so we fast on this day.' He said: "We have more right to Moosa (alayhis salaam) than you." [Saheeh Bukharee]

So he fasted on that day and commanded [the Muslims] to fast on that day. He (sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam) did not tell ordinary Muslims to fast on 'Aashooraa', but he used to say:

"This is the day of 'Aashooraa'; I am fasting on this day and whoever wishes to fast on this day may fast."

And he (sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam) said:

"Fasting on 'Aashooraa' expiates for the sins of one year and fasting on the day of 'Arafaah' expiates for the sins of two years."

When, towards the end of his life, the Prophet (sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam) heard that the Jews took the day of 'Aashooraa' as a festival, he said:

"If I live until next year, I will certainly fast on the ninth"

to be different from the Jews, and not to resemble them in taking the day as a festival.

As for the other things, such as cooking special dishes with or without grains, or wearing new clothes, or spending money on one's family, or buying the year's supplies on that day, or doing special acts of worship such as special prayers or deliberately slaughtering an animal on that day, or saving some of the meat of the sacrifice to cook with grains, or wearing kohl and henna, or taking a bath (ghusl), or shaking hands with one another, or visiting one another, or visiting the mosques and mashhads (shrines) and so on... all of this is reprehensible bid'ah and is wrong.

None of it has anything to do with the Sunnah of the Messenger of Allaah (sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam) or the way of the Khulafa' al-Raashidoon.

It was not approved of by any of the Imaams of the Muslims, not Maalik, not al-Thawri, not al-Layth ibn Sa'd, not Abu Haneefah, not al-Awzaa'ee, not al-Shaafa'i, not Ahmad ibn Hanbal, not Ishaq ibn Raahwayh, not any of the Imaams and scholars of the Muslims.

The religion of Islam is based on two principles: that we should worship nothing besides Allaah Alone, and that we should worship Him in the manner that He has prescribed, (i.e: the Qur'aan and the Sunnah of the Messenger

(sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam)) not by means of bid'ah or reprehensible innovations. Allaah says:

"... So whoever hopes for the Meeting with his Lord, let him work righteousness and associate none as a partner in the worship of his Lord." [Soorah al-Kahf (18): 110]

Righteous deeds are those, which are loved by Allaah and His Messenger (sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam), those which are prescribed in Islam and in the Sunnah. Thus, Umar ibn al-Khattaab (radiyallaahu anhu) used to say in his du'aa':

"O Allaah, make all of my deeds righteous and make them purely for Your sake, and do not let there be any share for anyone or anything else in them."